

Interviews with War Dog Operatives

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Series 3, Profile 5 – East Timor

Sergeant Dean Hedberg – Royal Australian Corps of Military Police

Dateline for this profile is 10 December 2009.

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Background

Sergeant (Sgt) Dean Hedberg was born in Gympie, Queensland in 1968 and raised in the rural town of Woolooga, not far from Gympie. He moved from Woolooga when he was aged five to Maryborough, Qld. His schooling was completed in Maryborough, Queensland and Dean began work as a machinery operator on a water pipeline scheme and then as a storeman / clerk. He joined the Army Reserve when he was 17 and served with D Company (D Coy) and A Company (A Coy), 9th Battalion Royal Queensland Regiment. Recruit training was completed at Wacol in 1985 and his Initial Employment Training completed in 1987. He was promoted to Corporal (Cpl) and served as an Infantry Section Commander and later on as Platoon Sergeant. In 2002, Dean was attracted to the Military Police (MP) because the MP had military working dogs (MWD). On transfer into the Australian Regular Army (ARA) in 2002, Dean attended the ARA basic MP course which went for three months and then asked for employment in the Military Police Dog (MPD) stream. However, the personnel management policy was that he would need to serve for twelve months in a non-MPD posting before he would be considered for a change of trade stream into the dogs.

Dean was posted to 1 MP Coy in Townsville in April 2002. During Dean's posting to Townsville he was deployed in September 2002 as a Security Attachment on far northern border security returning to Australia in February 2003. In June 2005 Dean deployed to Malaysia and Singapore as a member of Rifle Company Butterworth as the Military Police attachment. At the end of 2005, he was successful in transiting to the MPD unit based at Oakey in Queensland. In February 2006, Dean commenced his Military Police Dog Handler (MPDH) course and graduated in May of that year. Two weeks after he graduated from the dog course, Dean was deployed to East Timor (ET).

East Timor

Dean was deployed to ET but could not take his own dog, MPD Rutley, because of complications with the dog's Rabies vaccination. So Dean was teamed-up with a pool dog named MWD Beavis. The notice to move was very short. There was a five dog team contingent told to stay close to the phone ready for immediate deployment. Dean's call came at 2300 hrs when he was at home. He grabbed some gear and reported to the MP dog platoon at the Army Aviation Centre Oakey. At 0200 hrs they deplaned at Oakey and flew to Townsville. From Townsville to Darwin by civilian air charter and then by RAAF C 130 transport aircraft from Darwin to Comoro airport near Dili in ET.

The situation in Dili was extreme. There were murders, riots, looting, house burnings and general civil unrest in many places. The local police were under extreme duress and needed assistance very quickly. The C130 approach was tactical and when the MP diggers and their MPD's deplaned they were wearing body armour and their personal weapons were at "Action" (a bullet in the chamber ready to fire). They deplaned quickly, loaded their gear and dogs on to their Unimog truck and drove to the ET Police detention centre in Dili. It was now getting dark and they had to get set up as quickly as they could.

The duties for the MP dog teams were to provide security for the detention centre and to support infantry patrols mounted by the 3rd and 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR and 2 RAR). This demonstrated the flexibility of these dog teams. When they were assigned to detention centre duties they were required to act in the role of security dog teams for the facility, which included detaining a person with one bite to the forearm and holding them there until the person was detained by a law-enforcement officer. When they were assigned to infantry patrols they provided a broad capability including the ability

to track humans, which included giving a passive alert to the presence of a person of interest to the patrol – two entirely different missions.

MPD Rutley arrived in ET in July and Dean re-teamed with him. Beavis became a pool dog in ET and was operated as a back-up for other MP dog teams.

On one patrol, “Rutley and I were called to a site in support of a 2 RAR patrol. They had identified a dangerous person who was heavily involved in the illegal drug and weapons trade. The infantry wanted this guy urgently and MP Corporal Steve Wood and his dog Max and I with Rutley were briefed that the offender had bolted along a path. The offender was in such a rush to get away from the patrol that he lost a thong. Steve Wood and Max scented on that and followed up the offender only to find the other thong on the path. This confirmed that Max was on the right track. The track lead to a village but night had come and we had to wait until next day to continue the follow-up of the offender. His track lead to a group of houses in the village and Max showed interest in a house. A search of the house revealed a cache of weapons, but the offender had bolted again”. This was a successful search where the dog was the principal device for the success of the mission. The offender would have a lot more respect for the patrols knowing that dogs were never far away.

In another incident: “Rutley and I were called to the area near the Komoro Bridge in Dilli, where another shooting had occurred. It was at night in an area well known for gang violence and marauding armed groups. We were given sketchy details of the shooter but enough for Rutley to pick up his scent. He tracked the offender despite the presence of people, chickens, detritus all over the place and the presence of the gangs of youths. Again, my coverman was an AFP officer. Rutley tracked for about 45 minutes and ended up in a cluster of houses with animal yards including pig wallows, chicken coops, banana plants and fences. Rutley wanted to jump a fence in order to continue with the track. But that would have led us into more of the same thing and a possible ambush. We called the track off, but the AFP coverman and I were really happy with the way Rutley managed to hang on to the track. From my point of view, it was hard trying to read the dog in the dark wearing night vision goggles and this was another reason why we called it quits when we did. I would not have been able to see Rutley indicate a potential ambush in the darkness.” Dean had a lot of confidence in his AFP coverman. The AFP policeman was in the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team in Australia. He knew how to react and he would have been totally reliable had things gone pear-shaped that night.

In a third incident: Dean experienced an incident with armed civilians. In his words: “Rutley and I were working in the area of the Aqua Pod (A-Pod, a place where ships would come in) and we were told that a person had ridden up on a motorcycle, drew out a pistol and shot dead one person and wounded two others. We were called to track the offender. After much deliberation about the details of the attacker and the direction of his escape, Rutley picked up the scent and we were off tracking. My cover man was an Australian Federal Police (AFP) officer. It was early afternoon and the heat and humidity were fierce. Rutley tracked through streets and alleys but lost the track where the ground had been contaminated by people and vehicles”.

In fact, respect was demonstrated in the most unusual ways. Many times police officers and patrol members would be confronted by gangs of youths. The youths knew that the uniformed personnel would not open fire without extreme provocation. So they pushed their luck to a certain limit and would try to intimidate the patrol members to get them as far on edge as they could. Where a patrol was supported by a dog, the dog team would be placed at the rear of the patrol to add depth to the confrontation, but when the youths appeared to be inciting violence, the dogs would come to the front and the youths would become very compliant, very quickly. The youths also had metal darts which they would fire at the patrols using a bow and arrow technique. The darts could cause serious injury as a steel projectile fired from a sling shot. The chance of losing an eye to one of these devices was always present and injury to the dogs was always a danger on our mind, as they did not wear any protection against these weapons. Again, the dogs were used to disperse these youths into the adjacent alleys and pathways and away from the main streets or roads. There is no doubt that a dog the size of a German Shepherd demanded respect, and got it.

There was good cooperation between the RAAF MWD teams and the MP dog teams. Both groups would assist each other when the need arose to add depth to a dog oriented requirement.

The AFP was deployed many times on building searches. They could initiate a building search on intelligence reports without the need to gain a search warrant first. The MP dog teams worked with the AFP Fast Reaction Teams through out the city of Dilli and surrounds. The patrol with the AFP became a regular task and was looked forward to by the MP Dog Handlers due to the different nature of the work involved which included building searches. As of a result of the nature of the work with the AFP, all of the handlers developed a very close relationship with them. The AFP would ask for dog support quite often and this would cause some suspects to surrender without trying to hide in the buildings.

There was a strange twist to one incident. Dean and Bevis went on a mounted night patrol with 2 RAR on board an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC). The patrol was moving down a road when they were overtaken by two locals on a motor cycle. They were clearly quite drunk. For some reason the person controlling the motor cycle lost control which caused it to flip over its front wheel and this threw the pillion passenger on to the bitumen. He hit the road so hard that he broke his nose, lost teeth and managed to generally mess himself up. The Australians stopped, administered first aid and moved the unconscious civilian into the back of the APC. Gangs were roaming with their darts and it was not a good idea to be caught outside the APC in the middle of the night. The civilian was stabilised and moved to the hospital in the back of the APC. On the way to the hospital he regained consciousness in the back of the APC, which was illuminated with red light. When he opened his eyes he was aware of being in a red environment and he was looking straight into the panting face of Beavis. He must have thought that he had died and gone to hell.

In October 2006, after five months in-country, Dean and Rutley returned to Australia (RTA). MWD Beavis RTA a little earlier due to health problems.

Oakey

On his RTA, Dean resumed his job at the MP Dog Platoon (MPD Pl) at the Army Aviation Centre Oakey. In 2007 Dean completed his subjects for Sergeant and was promoted to that rank in January 2008. Then in April 2008, Dean was required to deploy again to ET, together with MPD Rutley.

ET Twice

Dean deployed with 3 RAR as the MP MPD detachment commander. He had three Cpls with their dogs under his command. Dean's detachment was co-located for the purposes of housing with Admin Coy 3 RAR at the Heli-pod (a place where helicopters operate) in Dili, but they were embedded as a part of Support Coy 3 RAR. They were the assets of the Commanding Officer 3 RAR to employ as he saw fit.

On this deployment the gang violence had reduced, but the patrol activity was still intense. Dean's dog teams would move with 3 RAR patrols in both bush and urban settings and provide a tracking capability when required. During this deployment, Dean could see that the role of the AFP had become more in an advisory capacity as a result they did not request dog support. The United Nations (UN) management teams were now taking over from the military and the UN preferred to keep the military to last resort peace keeping, rather than their previous role as peace makers. This gave the MP dog teams many opportunities to work with Australian and New Zealand soldiers. Many of these soldiers were willing participants in the training of the dogs during "man-work" assignments. One outcome of this was that a good understanding of the capabilities of the dogs to perform as trackers, and in addition, the same dogs could be employed to "take a person down on command of its handler" ie "man-work".

The Australians had New Zealanders (Kiwis) as neighbours in the Heli-pod area and so the MP dog teams worked with the Kiwi Infantry and Kiwi Aviation (Iroquois) asset often. However, the Kiwi Aviation asset had a strange sense of humour. They had made a wheel of misfortune which worked like a "chocolate wheel". The wheel would spin and stop at a segment where a message was written. The aim of the wheel was to choose a fate for a person who had made a bad mistake during the previous week, and

the “chocolate wheel of fate” was always bad news for its victim. The Kiwis asked if one of the segments could include “Dog Attack” - such that a victim would be attacked by an MPD. Dean reluctantly agreed, but with a host of safety procedures in place. Eventually a New Zealander managed to spin “Dog Attack” as his “personal retribution for his misdemeanour”. The problem was that he was a pilot – not the sort of person you would want have all chewed up. Rutley was chosen as the dog to attack the Kiwi pilot. Dean prepared the pilot with as much dog attack protection as he could. Generally when training a dog for “man-work” the person would wear a training sleeve. The pilot donned this and was also wearing a video camera taped to his chest. Rutley went straight for his arm and gripped with his canines. The Kiwi pilot was looking a little red in the face with the effort of the dog on the arm, so Dean broke off the attack. The Kiwi pilot was shaken but not stirred. The Kiwi pilot sent the footage of the video that was on his chest to his mum in New Zealand. So grateful was the mum of the footage that she sent over a box of Schmackos (dog treats) for Rutley. It didn’t end there, a second Kiwi spun “Dog Attack” and Dean gave him the attack sleeve. But, this Kiwi was a little different. He got dressed in a chicken suit and started to cluck and squawk when Rutley was ordered to attack the sleeve. Rutley didn’t care whether it was a big chook or not, he saw the sleeve and took it in one massive, snarling bite. Dean ordered him off and he let go immediately. The Kiwi/Chook came close to laying an egg.

Dean had the unfortunate event with having a dog from his section die on operations. MPD Ziggy was teamed with CPL Dean Jennings and passed away in ET due to being infected with Viral Meningitis. This was a sad time for the team due to Ziggy only having a month to go on his deployment, before returning to Australia. Ziggy was cremated in Timor and his remains were interned in a memorial area after a service that was conducted by the Army Chaplain. This was attended by a large majority of the Battle group and the Joint Task Force. The memorial area has been created at the Australian Army HQ in Dili, beside two other MPD’s that had deceased on early operations.

Dean RTA in October 2008 and escorted the three MP dogs to Sydney. They had to wait overnight at the airport for AQIS to allow them into the quarantine area. Apparently, AQIS had a civilian dog arriving by air from Germany and wanted to admit all the dogs into their Eastern Creek facility at the one time. This was a bit of an imposition because the MPD’s could not be released from their transportation boxes until they were inside the AQIS facility. The dogs stayed in those boxes for a very long time as a result. The dogs remained in quarantine for thirty days before returning to their unit at Oakey.

Back to Oakey

Dean resumed his duties with Rutley at the MPD Pl at Oakey. Dean expects to be posted at the end of 2010 to Townsville, Brisbane or Canungra. This will require him to accept a non-dog posting, so that his career does not stagnate in the one trade stream. Dean hopes to return to the MPD Pl as the Sergeant Major, some time in the future. He will undertake his Warrant Officer qualification courses during 2010. Dean is married with three children – two of them twins.

Rutley

Rutley at the deadline for this profile was six years old. Dean teamed up with him initially during the basic dog course and at that time, Rutley was two years old. Rutley had been a show dog, pure bred working line German Shepherd, from a family in the Darling Downs area. However, Rutley became too aggressive to show in dog competitions and so was donated to the Military Police Dog Platoon. He continues to serve the Australian Defence Force (ADF) under Dean’s control at the Army Aviation Centre in Oakey, Queensland.

Beavis

Beavis was a pool dog. This made him available for teaming up with handlers at short notice. He could be used while a handler found himself without his own dog for a short period of time. This is what happened when Dean took Beavis to ET. Dean’s own dog, Rutley, had temporary problems with his rabies shot and had to be retained in Australia until those problems were resolved. Beavis filled that vacancy. Beavis was RTA in October 2006 due to health problems and was quarantined at the AQIS facility at Eastern Creek

Sydney. The AQIS veterinarian discovered that Beavis had a large tumour of the heart and this was causing Beavis a lot of discomfort. The tumour had grown and was distending Beavis' abdomen at which time the veterinarian had no choice but to euthanize him. The ADF lost a fine dog.



Cpl Dean Hedberg and MPD Rutley at the Detention Centre in Dili, ET, 2006. Look at those jaws!
Image courtesy of Dean Hedberg 2006



CPL Dean Hedberg and MWD Beavis on patrol with a section from D Coy 2 RAR in Dili ET 2006.
Image courtesy of Dean Hedberg 2006.



Cpl Dean Hedberg and MPD Rutley at Detention Centre, Dili, ET, 2006. Image courtesy of Dean Hedberg 2006.



Cpl Dean Hedberg and MPD Rutley on night patrol in ET, 2006. Image courtesy of Dean Hedberg 2006.



Cpl Dean Hedberg and Rutley at Oakey 2006. Image courtesy of Dean Hedberg 2006.